

Fl My First Flower

A story that began with a glance

Part I



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Author's Note

This book wasn't written all at once.

It came together slowly, between ordinary days and moments I didn't know I would remember for this long.

Most of what you'll read here wasn't meant to become a story. It was just something I felt at the time—something I didn't always understand, but couldn't ignore.

I've kept it as close to the truth as I could—not the perfect version, just the way it felt.

This isn't about big events. It's about the small ones—the kind that don't seem important while they're happening, but stay longer than they should.

If you're reading this, I hope you don't just follow what happened.

I hope you feel it.

-Asmit
April, 2026

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Prologue

We were never supposed to meet.

Too many things had to go wrong for it to happen. Different paths, different choices, a different school—any one of them would have been enough to keep us strangers. We were meant to stay far away from each other, just two people living separate lives without ever knowing what they missed.

And yet, somehow, we crossed paths.

First far away, then across from each other, and then, without either of us realising it, right beside each other.

People talk about the red string of fate—an invisible thread tying two people together no matter how far they are. Maybe it's not real.

But something was.

Because out of all the distances that could have stayed between us, we didn't remain distant.

We stayed.

And somewhere along the way, without even noticing when it happened—

we became something neither of us had planned for.

I was not your first love, your first kiss, or your first hug.

But I promise,

I will be the first to change how you see the world,

*the first to love every part of you, even the ones you've kept hidden
from yourself,*

the first who would sacrifice everything for you,

set the world ablaze just to keep you warm,

*whisper your name to the moon so it remembers you long after we are
gone,*

write you into eternity across empty, waiting pages.

Will I be the first to show you what love truly means?

Chapter I – First Sight

The Bud

*“The very first moment I held her,
my heart was irrevocably gone.”*

-Jane Austen

I didn't know a moment could change the seasons inside me.

But the day I first saw those eyes, something changed—quietly, the way dawn slips in before anyone notices. The world was loud around me, filled with ordinary noise, yet she arrived in silence, like a petal drifting out of nowhere.

7th May, 2025.

I don't remember most things from that day.

Not the weather.

Not the voices.

Not even what I was supposed to be thinking.

But I remember the clock.

10:17.

And I remember her.

The way she looked up—just once—as she entered the classroom, holding a water bottle. *Always a bottle*, isn't it?

It wasn't dramatic. Nothing paused. No one noticed.

But something in me did.

The colour of her eyes didn't strike me all at once. It settled slowly, almost gently, as if it had been there before I realised it. Like spring arriving quietly in the middle of winter, without asking if it should.

She was unknown to me.

And yet... something about her didn't feel unfamiliar.

I couldn't explain it then.

I don't think I can now.

People say you only realise a flower was rare after it's gone.
But even in that first moment, before I knew anything about her, I
felt it—something different, something I couldn't name yet, but
couldn't ignore either.

Maybe that's why my story begins there.
Not with words, not with conversations, but with that single
glance... that quiet shift I didn't understand at the time.

That was the day my heart found its first flower.

And even after that moment passed, everything else continued as
it should have—the class, the voices, the day itself—but I didn't.
A part of me had stayed behind, somewhere in that second,
replaying it in a way I couldn't control.
I didn't know what it meant.
I only knew something had begun.

And from that moment on, every page of my life... slowly, quietly,
began turning towards her.

Chapter II – Anthesis

Your Name?

“All names are heard but one is felt”

I fell in love.

There's no gentler way to say it, no smarter way to phrase it. The gloomy, bulked-up boy who had quietly lost interest in life... fell for someone. Someone he didn't know anything about. Not her name. Not her story. Not even whether she truly existed in the same class or if she was just a passing moment sent to confuse the universe.

All I knew were your eyes—those eyes I could stare at for a lifetime and still feel like I'd only just begun to understand them.

The next day, I arrived last. Of course I did. Some things about me don't change. The only empty place left was a seat behind you, and it felt like fate laughing softly as it placed me there.

You probably didn't notice. Why would you?

I didn't talk to you. Couldn't. Something inside me was still too bruised from the past, still carrying a quiet trauma I had never fully confronted. My voice stayed locked somewhere deep, and all I could do was exist quietly in the row behind you, pretending to look at the board while every cell in me was aware of your presence.

And for some reason, I kept sitting in that same place, day after day. Maybe I didn't want to break the pattern. Maybe I didn't want to lose the one small thing that made the days feel different.

Two days passed like this—me silent, you unaware.
And then you spoke to me.

I don't remember a single word you said. Not one. Your voice washed over me like a breeze too soft to hold on to, too beautiful to trap in memory. All I remember is the warmth in your tone, the way your presence filled the space around me even though you weren't trying.

Somewhere in the middle of that conversation—something I couldn't even properly follow—you asked me my name. I told you. I don't even remember how I sounded. But I remember what came after.

I asked yours.

You said it. Softly. Clearly. Like it was just a normal answer to a normal question. But it didn't feel normal to me. It stayed. The way you said it. The way it sounded. The way it settled somewhere inside my chest.

And before I could stop myself, I asked again.

I don't know what it looked like from your side. Maybe it sounded like I didn't hear you the first time. Maybe it felt unnecessary. But the truth was—I just wanted to hear it again. From you. The pronunciation. The softness. The way your name sounded when it left your lips... I wasn't ready to let it go after hearing it just once.

You probably didn't think much of it. But I did.

That was our first conversation. Short. Unbalanced. A little messy. But to me, it was enough.

Enough to plant something inside me—a beginning I didn't understand yet, but one I would never forget.

Because somewhere between you asking my name... and me asking yours twice, something had already begun.

Chapter III – Lingering Spring

Past That Day

*“Some distances are measured in seats
... not steps.”*

After that day, something in me refused to return to normal.

The moment I spoke to you—those few shaky, forgettable words—my heartbeat began doing things it had never practiced. It paced, stumbled, rushed, like it was trying to learn a new feeling all at once. Talking to you wasn't excitement or fear or happiness. It was something softer... something that made my chest feel too small for what it suddenly wanted to hold.

You probably don't remember that conversation.

Why would you?

But I do.

Whenever you spoke, even if it wasn't to me, the world dimmed politely. The classroom blurred, the noise faded, and all I could hear was your voice—light, warm, and unexplainably grounding, like it knew exactly where to settle inside me.

After that tiny conversation, I began doing something ridiculous. I started fighting destiny for one specific desk—the seat right behind you. Coming earlier, walking faster, pretending I cared about that bench more than anything in my life. Because sitting there wasn't just about a seat anymore. It was the closest place life allowed me to be near you.

And somehow, that became enough.

The funny part was... you didn't know any of this.

You sat there, completely unaware that a boy behind you was learning new emotions the way a star learns to glow—quietly,

clumsily, but with too much wonder. Sometimes you'd shift in your seat, and a single strand of your hair falling slightly to the side was enough to make me forget everything else.

Every accidental glance you threw back felt like a small miracle I wasn't prepared for. My heart reacted before I could, my eyes looked away like they were guilty, and my mind... it stayed there long after the moment had passed.

You probably never noticed how often that happened.

I did.

I rehearsed things to say—jokes, questions, anything that could turn silence into something more—but my voice always hid behind old fears. So, I chose silence instead. Silence, and that one seat. Silence, and the small, quiet joy of being close enough to exist in the same space as you.

It didn't feel like much.

But to me, it was everything.

All I knew was this—

after that day, nothing in me would ever be the same.

Chapter IV – The Petal

The Ninth Day

*“Sometimes, it isn’t the moment you meet someone...
but the moment they notice you back that changes
everything.”*

We started talking a little every day, not in a way that would make the world notice, but in the quiet, almost invisible way two people begin circling each other before either of them realises what is happening. Small exchanges, passing words, tiny conversations that didn't look like much from the outside, yet somehow felt heavier than they should have.

You probably didn't think anything of it.

To you, it was just talking.

To me... it was becoming something I started waiting for.

You began sitting with a friend of yours, and through one of those coincidences that feel almost scripted by a bored universe, I ended up becoming friends with her too. It happened naturally, without effort, like I was slowly being pulled into a space that existed around you.

And then, through her, I learned something that stayed with me longer than it should have.

You already knew my Instagram account.

You had seen my posts.

You had watched my stories.

You knew me... at least a version of me I hadn't shown you directly.

For a moment, it felt like something inside my chest had been opened. Like I had been seen without even trying to be. And I don't think you'll ever understand what that did to me—how something so small could feel so impossibly big.

It took me two days to find your account.

Two days of searching, scrolling, guessing, opening profiles that weren't yours, hoping the next one might be. It sounds stupid

now, but at that time it felt like I was chasing something important without even knowing why.

And then, on the ninth day of falling in love with you... you gave me your real account.

16th of May.

I still remember the date.
Not because I tried to.
But because my heart decided it mattered.

It was quick. Too quick, maybe. Things weren't supposed to happen this easily for me. Not something like this.

But even then, nothing had truly started between us.

Your replies were short. Careful. Almost like you were there, but not completely. Sometimes they came, sometimes they didn't. And there were moments where I could feel myself slipping toward being forgotten before I had even been properly noticed.

You didn't know that.
But I felt it.

There was none of the warmth we have now—just the faintest flicker of something that could become something more, and I held onto that flicker like it was the only light I had.

Meanwhile, your friend and I started talking more. Mostly on Snapchat. She was easy to talk to, cheerful, kind in a way that didn't feel forced. And for a moment—just a moment—I found myself confused in the worst possible way.
Was I feeling what I thought I was feeling?

Or was I just overwhelmed by attention I wasn't used to?
But no matter how much I tried to question it, the answer didn't
change.

It was always you.
Not her.
Never her.

Because no matter how easy those conversations felt, my mind
kept returning to the same place—back to you. To your eyes. To
your voice. To the way you had quietly settled somewhere inside
me without asking.

Talking to her didn't feel wrong.
In a strange way, it felt like a doorway.

Because through her, I started learning small things about you.
Tiny details. Fragments of your day. Pieces of who you were when
you weren't talking to me.

And you'll probably never understand this part—
but those small pieces meant everything.

For someone only nine days into loving you, those little glimpses
were enough to keep the world glowing just a little longer.

Enough to stay.
Enough to hope.
Even when there wasn't much to hold on to yet.

Chapter V – Roots of Trust

Credentia

*“To be trusted is a greater compliment
than to be loved.”*

-George MacDonald

It was the day before our summer vacations began, the kind of day that feels half goodbye and half waiting, when everyone is tired but a little lighter because freedom is close. We had a parent–teacher meet that morning; mine went the usual way, nothing special, just a few predictable remarks for a boy who had learned to stay quiet. But yours felt different, even from a distance—tense, uneasy, like you were carrying something heavier than the day itself.

We didn't talk about it in person. It happened later, through messages. I remember opening the chat and typing something simple—just asking how it went. I wasn't expecting much. Maybe a short reply. Maybe nothing at all.

But you replied.

And then you kept replying.

Slowly, message by message, you told me everything—about the complaints, about being scolded in class, about going home and facing it again, about your parents arguing while you stood there in the middle of it all. And then how you locked yourself in your room, didn't talk to anyone, didn't want to face anyone.

I was just sitting there, staring at my screen, reading your words one by one. There was no voice, no expression, no way to see how you looked while saying it... but somehow, I could feel it.

And the strangest part was this—
you were telling all of it to me.

We weren't close. Not really. Just a little more than strangers tied together by a few conversations and a classroom. Yet that night, you chose me to hold something that heavy.

I didn't know what to say.

Still, I tried. I typed slowly, thinking before every word, trying not to mess it up. I tried to comfort you, tried to make things feel a little less overwhelming, even gave a few suggestions like I understood how to fix things.

I didn't.

I was just there.

And for some reason... you let me be there.

Tell me—why me? what did you see in me that night that made you stay and keep talking

Even now, I don't fully understand it. Maybe you trusted me without realising it. Or maybe you just thought, what will this idiot even do.

Honestly... not a bad thought.

When the conversation slowed down, I wished you good night. Just a small message, just a quiet hope that maybe you'd feel a little less alone after saying all that.

You didn't reply.

And it was fair.

But still... it stayed.

Not heartbreak. Just a quiet heaviness that didn't leave when it should have.

And somewhere in the middle of all that, I told a friend something I hadn't never said out loud before—that I had fallen in love with you. Not maybe, not a little, but properly. She just said, "Are you really in for it? Don't come crying again like the last time."

It sounded like a warning.

Like she already knew how this could end.

But I think, even then—
I had already crossed the point
where turning back was even an option.
And maybe... I never wanted it to be.

Chapter VI – The First Bloom

Her First Picture

“I could watch you for a lifetime.”

*-A Thousand Years
John Michael Howell, JVKE*

After that day, our conversations started growing without either of us really noticing it. What began as short replies slowly stretched into longer chats, minutes slipping into hours—not because we were sharing anything deep, but because joking together and talking nonsense somehow felt easier than staying strangers.

And then one day, I did something stupidly bold. I told you I kind of liked someone in our class. The way you reacted—god—you lit up instantly. Your messages suddenly had a different energy, excitement I could feel even through the screen, and you kept asking who it was, guessing, teasing, trying to pull the answer out of me. I didn't tell you. I said I needed to confirm it first, that I'd tell you later. That one sentence changed something. A soft bombshell—but still a bombshell.

Because how was I supposed to tell you the truth—that it was you? We had known each other for barely a month. Saying it then would've been like breaking something before it even had the chance to exist. And I wasn't that brave. First love doesn't make you fearless. It makes you careful.

Meanwhile, I ended up talking to your friend more than I talked to you, and then suddenly—you pointed it out. You thought I liked her. That moment... BRO. Nooooooooooooo. A complete disaster. I denied it immediately, but yeah, the damage to my dignity was done.

Then there was that night. Around 1:30 a.m., you texted first, out of nowhere. You were coming back from a marriage, and for some reason you were different that night—more open, more comfortable, like something in you had decided to drop its guard for a while. We talked a lot. Some of the things we talked about... I still can't believe happened. Embarrassing enough to never fully

write down, but real enough to never forget. And I remember thinking—why are you so comfortable with me? I didn't question it. I just stayed there.

Somewhere in between all that, we started talking about random things—hair, small stuff—and that's when I found out you were allergic to eggs. Such a small detail, but it stayed. Because it felt like the first real piece of you, I was allowed to keep. I don't think I had ever spoken to a girl like that before. Not like this. Not that freely.

And then it happened.
You sent me your picture.
Your first picture.

I still remember how my heart reacted before my mind even processed it. It was a replay on Instagram, but I paused it and just... stared. You were wearing a brown glossy saree, the kind that catches light in a way that feels almost unreal, paired with a textured white blouse. The oxidized earrings, the way everything came together—I don't think I had the right words back then. Maybe I still don't. You looked... beautiful doesn't even cover it.

For a moment, everything inside me just stopped.

I'll be honest. I took a screenshot. I still have it in my private album. I haven't looked at it in a while, but it's still there—my second favourite. Yeah, yeah. Stalker behaviour. Bad guy. Criminal mastermind. I don't care. Because every time I looked at it, there was this strange kind of peace. Like my eyes had finally found something they didn't want to look away from.

That was your first picture—the first time I saw you clearly, outside that blurred memory of a classroom door. And you

probably don't even realise what that moment did to me. We talked a lot after that—more than I expected, more than I was prepared for, more than I understood at the time.

Chapter VII : Germination

Hush

*“Some feelings exist only because we never asked if
they were real.”*

Somewhere after that night, without any announcement or realisation, talking to you stopped feeling like something new and started feeling like something expected. It wasn't planned, and it definitely wasn't spoken out loud, but my days began arranging themselves around small moments—when you might reply, when your name might light up my screen, when everything else could pause for a few seconds just so I could read your words.

There was no sudden jump into closeness. No dramatic shift. Just a quiet stretching of time, the kind you don't notice until it has already passed.

Conversations that once lived in jokes and random nonsense started lasting longer, drifting into evenings, sometimes slipping into late nights without either of us acknowledging how long we'd been there. I didn't wake up one day thinking I'm attached now—it happened far more quietly than that. It happened in the way I checked my phone without thinking, in the way silence felt different when you hadn't replied yet, in the way my mood softened the moment you did.

You probably didn't notice any of it.

But I did.

I started remembering small things about you without trying—the way you typed when you were excited, the pauses you took when you were tired, how your replies felt lighter on some days and slower on others. None of it felt important at the time, but it all stayed with me, settling somewhere deep, like my mind had already decided you were someone worth remembering.

And the strange part was—I didn't feel nervous around you anymore. The fear that once made my hands hesitate before

replying slowly disappeared. Talking to you didn't feel like something I had to get right. It felt easy. Like resting. Like I didn't have to think about every word before sending it.

Like I could just be there.

There were nights when nothing meaningful was said at all. Just messages going back and forth about nothing. But even those conversations mattered.

Especially those.

Because that's when I realised something I never said out loud—

I wasn't talking to you because I liked you anymore.

I was talking to you because I missed you when I didn't.

That thought...

it stayed.

It didn't scare me enough to stop.

But it scared me enough to stay quiet.

I didn't question it. Didn't analyse it. Didn't try to understand what it meant or where it was going.

I just let it exist.

Sometimes, in the middle of a conversation, I'd catch myself smiling at my screen for no reason, and I'd immediately look

away, like someone might see me, like the room itself could understand what was happening.

Like the feeling was something fragile.

Something I shouldn't look at too directly.

I still didn't know where any of this was going. Didn't know what you felt. Didn't know what I was allowed to hope for.

But I knew this—
you had become a part of my everyday life so quietly that I never saw it happen.

And maybe that's how it always begins. Not with something loud. Not with confessions. But with comfort.

With the slow, unnoticed moment when someone stops being just a person you talk to...
and becomes someone you wait for.

Chapter VIII – Unknown Petals

What Was I to You?

*“Some feelings exist only because we never asked if
they were real.”*

I never really knew what I was to you, and everything I felt after that lived somewhere between hope and imagination, stitched together by guesses I never had the courage to confirm. It wasn't confusion exactly—it was something quieter, something that stayed in the background, growing without asking for clarity.

Sometimes I thought I was just a name you replied to when the day felt slow, someone easy to talk to, someone who listened without asking too much, someone safe enough to exist without consequences. Other times, I let myself believe something softer—that maybe you smiled when my message arrived, that maybe you paused before replying not because you were busy, but because you cared enough to choose your words.

Maybe I was comfort.

Maybe I was routine.

Maybe I was simply there.

There were days you replied instantly, as if the conversation had already been waiting somewhere between us, and there were days you disappeared for hours, leaving me to sit with silence and pretend I wasn't reading meaning into it. I told myself not to overthink it, not to attach emotions to timing, not to build stories out of small things—but hearts don't really listen when they start leaning in.

Did you ever reread my messages the way I reread yours?

Did I ever cross your mind,
when we weren't talking?

Did my absence ever feel even slightly louder than my presence?

And if I disappeared for a day

would you notice it the way I did?
I never asked you any of this.
And maybe that's why it stayed- for days, hours and seconds.

Because the thought I tried hardest to avoid was always there,
somewhere in the back—that maybe all of this was happening
only inside me, that I was building something you never even
noticed taking shape.

That idea hurt more than rejection ever could, because rejection
ends something cleanly, but uncertainty lets it grow quietly,
endlessly, without asking permission.

I never asked what you thought of me, because some questions
feel too fragile to survive being spoken out loud, and I wasn't
ready to lose the comfort of not knowing. So, I kept wondering,
and somewhere in between all those thoughts, you became
someone I carried with me everywhere, even when we weren't
talking.

And sometimes, late at night, when everything was quiet enough
to be honest

Tell me honestly...
what was I to you?

Chapter IX – Roots of Envy

Possession

“If I can’t have you... I don’t want anyone else to.”

-Yuno Gassai
Future Diary (Mirai Nikki)

By the time July had settled in and our conversations had become a normal part of my day, I had already started feeling something for you that I wasn't fully ready to admit. It wasn't loud or dramatic, and it definitely wasn't something I spoke about. It just stayed there, quietly, somewhere in the background of my thoughts, showing up in small ways when I wasn't paying attention.

And somewhere around that time, something else appeared with it.

Jealousy.

Not the loud kind people talk about. Not anger. Not frustration.

Just a quiet discomfort... the kind that makes you question yourself because you know you don't really have the right to feel it.

I always knew you had other friends. Of course you did. You had your own circle, your own people, your own life that existed long before I showed up. I wasn't stupid enough to think I was the only one you talked to.

But knowing something...
and feeling it...
are two very different things.

Sometimes, in the middle of our conversations, you would casually mention someone else. A boy from class. A friend who said something funny. Someone who did something nice for you that day. You never meant anything by it. To you, it was just sharing your day.

But every time it happened, something inside me shifted.
Just a little.

There was one name that came up more than the others. And honestly, it made sense. I came into your life late. You already knew people before I even existed in your world. You were already friends with him.

There was nothing wrong with that.

Nothing unfair. Nothing I could question.
And yet... every time his name came up, I paused. Just for a second longer than I should have.

Sometimes you mentioned small things that shouldn't have mattered at all. Someone buying you food. Someone helping you with something. Normal things. Harmless things.

But they stayed with me.
Not because I was angry at you.
Not because I blamed them.

But because I knew I couldn't do those things.

I was just a teenager, living on careful pocket money, the kind you don't spend freely, the kind that comes with limits. And somewhere in my head, a quiet voice would say something I didn't want to hear—someone else can-do things for her that you can't.

I hated that thought.
But it stayed.
Because jealousy doesn't really care about logic.

There were also moments when your replies came slower, when you felt a little distant in the middle of conversations. I told

myself you were just busy, just talking to other people, just living your life like you always did.

Still...

I noticed it.

I always did.

Sometimes it felt like I was waiting for your attention while you were simply moving through your day.

And the worst part was— I knew it wasn't fair.

You never promised me anything.

You never said I was special.

You never gave me a reason to feel this way.

So, tell me...why did it still matter so much to me?

Why did I feel like I was losing something that was never mine?

I never said any of this to you.

On the outside, nothing changed. I still replied the same way, still joked, still acted like everything was normal.

But inside...something had already shifted.

The comfort I felt with you had quietly turned into something deeper.

And with that depth came something I hadn't expected.

The fear that maybe...

I wasn't the only one
who cared this much.

Chapter X – Falling Petals

Unravel

“Tell me, tell me, please tell me, what’s inside of me “

*-TK from Ling tosite sigure
unravel, Tokyo Ghoul*

There are moments when you know exactly what you want to say, but the distance between your heart and your fingers feels impossibly long. That was where I was. By then I had already accepted a truth I had been avoiding for weeks—I liked you. Not casually, not temporarily, but in that quiet, stubborn way that doesn't leave no matter how much you try to ignore it.

Understanding it was never the problem. Saying it was.

So instead of coming to you directly, I went to someone close to you first. One of your closest friends—K. I told her I thought I liked someone. Even typing that felt strange, like admitting something I couldn't take back. She said it simply—if you like someone, just tell her. Simple. Too simple.

And somehow, I still managed to complicate it. I joked, said something stupid— “what if I like you?”—and immediately took it back. She played along for a second, but I told her I was joking, that she probably already knew who I was talking about.

Maybe she did.

But tell me—
if you already knew
why did you let me struggle
with saying it for so long

Even after that, I still couldn't come to you. Every time I opened our chat, my fingers hovered... then stopped. I typed it, deleted it, typed it again, deleted it again. My heart was beating so loudly it felt like the phone could hear it.
So instead of saying it, I started writing.
Poems.

Words came easier that way. I could hide inside them. Sometimes I posted them, sometimes I didn't. Sometimes you noticed.

Tell me—
did you ever realise
who those words were for
or did they just pass by you

One day, I sent one to you and asked how it was. You said it was full of love. I stared at that message longer than I should have, then finally typed the truth—I wrote it for you.

For a few seconds, nothing.
Then you said you already knew.

I asked how.
You said—sixth sense.

I didn't know whether to laugh or panic. So, I asked what I was supposed to do now. And you said we should just stay friends the way we are.

No anger. No harsh rejection. Just one soft sentence that quietly closed a door I had spent so long trying to open.

And just like that, I understood something I had only heard about before.

The friendzone.

I told you it was okay. That we could keep things the same.
But tell me—
when you said “stay”
did you know I was choosing you

even after losing you
That night, I realised something.
Confessions don't always give you endings.
Sometimes... they just change the shape of the story.

Chapter 11 - Trunks

Heavier Words

*“Some conversations don’t bring you closer... they
make you stay.”*

By the time that day came, something between us had already started shifting. Not loudly, not in a way anyone else could notice, but quietly enough that only I could feel it. We were talking more, staying longer in conversations, and slowly moving away from random jokes into something that actually meant something. It didn't feel sudden. It felt like something that had been building for a while and had finally decided to show itself.

It was 29th June.

School had just reopened after the holidays, and everything felt slightly unfamiliar again—new routines, new seating, new spaces between people. I wasn't sitting behind you anymore. I had my own place now, a little distance that I didn't like but had no control over. And maybe that distance is what made me notice you more, because when you're not close to someone, you start paying attention in a different way.

That day, something happened in class. One of your friends got hurt, and for a moment, everything felt messy and unprepared. People didn't know what to do. Some just stood there. Some looked away. But you didn't hesitate. You stepped in, handled it, cleaned things up, took her with you, and made sure she was okay. And I just watched.

Not the situation itself, but the way you handled it. The way you didn't panic. The way you didn't make it a big deal. The way you just... cared. It wasn't something dramatic, but it stayed with me longer than I expected. It made me realise that there was more to you than the version I saw in chats.

Later that day, when I got home, I texted you. Not casually like before, not just to keep the conversation going, but because I

actually wanted to know if you were okay. And that small difference changed everything.

That conversation didn't stay small.
It stretched into something deeper.

We started talking about things that weren't just surface-level anymore. You spoke about your past, about things people had said to you, about moments that had stayed with you longer than they should have. And for the first time, I didn't just listen quietly like I usually do.

I spoke too.

I told you things I had never really shared with anyone properly. Things I normally keep to myself. And what surprised me the most was not what I said, but how easy it felt to say it. There was no pressure, no hesitation that usually stops me. It just... came out.

That day, the conversation didn't feel like time passing.
It felt like something building.

We talked for hours. About everything and nothing at the same time. About life, about people, about the kind of thoughts that usually stay inside your head. And somewhere in between all of that, something changed without either of us pointing it out.

For the first time, I didn't feel like just the listener in someone's life.
I felt included.

I felt seen.
And maybe that's why I said it.

“I’m really grateful to have a friend like you.”

It was a simple sentence, but it carried more meaning than I showed. Because for me, saying that wasn’t normal. It meant I trusted you enough to admit that you mattered.

You said something too. That I wasn’t like others. That I wasn’t fake. I don’t know how much of that you meant, or if it was just something said in the moment, but it stayed with me.

That night didn’t end quickly. The conversation stayed longer than usual, like neither of us wanted to leave it unfinished. And somewhere in between all of that, I did something I hadn’t done before.

I put up a story about you.
Not directly.
Not something obvious.

But something that was yours.
Something only, I would understand.

And I kept it.
First highlight.
First memory I chose not to let disappear.

And maybe that’s when I realised something I hadn’t said out loud yet—
this wasn’t just talking anymore.

This was something I was starting to hold on to.

did you ever notice that day felt different too?
or was it just another conversation for you?

and that story I put up... did you ever realise it was about you?

That day didn't change everything at once.

But it changed enough.

Enough for me to understand that whatever this was... it was no longer small. It was real.

And somewhere in between all those words, I stopped just liking you.

I started trusting you too.

Chapter 12 – The Thorns of a Rose

The Three Blades

“The world is cruel...but also very beautiful”

*-Mikasa Ackerman
Attack On Titan*

I. The Lover Boy

By the middle of July, I had unknowingly entered what I now call my lover boy era. That strange phase where a boy starts caring so much that he forgets where care ends and effort begin, where he becomes softer without noticing, more available without being asked, more present than necessary. Every small moment begins to feel important; every conversation starts to feel like something worth holding on to, and somewhere in between all that, he convinces himself that this is normal—that this is simply what liking someone feels like.

At that age, it does feel normal. You don't realise you're trying too hard. You just think you care. And maybe I did. Maybe I cared more than I understood.

One of those days was a Saturday. You and K had already decided you weren't going to school. At first, I thought I wouldn't go either. There didn't seem to be a reason to sit through extra classes, especially when the only reason I enjoyed being there wouldn't even be present.

But then you asked me to go. You needed the notes. It wasn't exactly a request. It felt like something I was supposed to do. And I didn't even question it.

So, I went.

I sat through those classes, writing things down that weren't even for me, listening without really listening, sitting in a room that looked exactly the same as always—and yet felt completely different.

Because you weren't there.

And that was enough to change everything.

Have you ever walked into a place expecting someone to be there... and then felt the silence differently when they weren't? The room doesn't just feel empty. It feels unfamiliar, like something important has been quietly removed and everything else is just... adjusting around it.

That day felt longer than it should have.

And I didn't realise it then...

but it was the first blade.

Tell me—

did you ever realise I showed up that day just because you asked me to or did it never matter enough to notice.

II. Miss Rumour

Around the same time, something else had begun to grow quietly in the background. There was a girl in class who had a habit of carrying words from one place to another, as if conversations were meant to travel instead of stay. By the time they reached you, they were never quite the same.

I wanted to call her a buffalo but can't disgrace them with her name.

I'll call her Miss Rumour at best.

Because that is what she seemed to understand best.

One morning, she came to me with something I had never asked to hear. She told me that another girl—a girl whose name was a beautiful flower, but didn't she turned out to be an ugly one? — had been talking about me and about you....

The first part didn't surprise me. Apparently, it was obvious that I liked you. Anyone paying attention could see it.

But then she laughed.

“Are you planning to marry her or something?”

Before I could respond, she added that maybe she herself should just marry me instead if my girl doesn't. The way she said it made everything feel smaller than it was supposed to be, like something I held seriously could be turned into a joke that anyone could laugh at.

She said I clearly liked you a lot... but didn't even know whether you liked me back. And that maybe you would just keep me around while school lasted, and then leave when it didn't matter anymore.

I didn't know what to believe.

Because rumours are strange.

Sometimes they grow.

Sometimes they twist.

But once they enter your mind... they don't leave easily.

And just like that, something that once felt simple began to feel uncertain.

was I ever just something temporary to you
or did I matter even a little more than that

And that was the second stab.

III. Et tu, Brute?

The third blade didn't arrive loudly. It didn't announce itself. It simply... reached me.

Sometime earlier, I had asked you if you could sing a song for me. It was a simple Hindi song, nothing serious, nothing important—just something small that felt meaningful to me because it involved you. I didn't think much of it then.

But instead of replying to me, you spoke about it with K.

And somehow, I ended up seeing a part of that conversation I was never supposed to see.

You mentioned my poems—the same ones you had once called beautiful—but there, you laughed about them. You said you didn't really mean it. That it was just something casual. That it wasn't serious.

It didn't hurt immediately.

It settled slowly.

Like something sinking deeper the more I tried to ignore it.

I read those lines again.

And then again.

As if repetition might change their meaning.

But it didn't.

Then came the voice note.

“Do you know why people invented guns? Because people like him don’t understand even a slap.”

I replayed it.

More than once.

Not because I didn’t hear it clearly—
but because I wanted to be wrong.

I wasn’t.

And what stayed with me even more than the words themselves
was what came after.

K didn’t defend me.
She agreed.

Maybe for both of you, it was just a conversation. Something said
in a moment. Something that didn’t carry weight.

But to me—

it did.

From that moment, something shifted. Not loudly, not visibly—
but enough. Enough for me to feel it in the way I thought, in the
way I replied, in the way something inside me didn’t sit the same
anymore.

For the next two days, I wasn’t the same with you. I still talked,
still replied, still showed up—but something in me had become

quieter, more careful, as if I was measuring my own presence
without meaning to.

You noticed.
Of course you did.
And you asked me what had happened.

That morning, I told you.
“I shouldn’t have done it... but I read part of your chat.”

You stayed quiet for a moment.
Then you admitted it.

No argument.
No denial.
Just a quiet “sorry.”

And we moved forward.

But tell me—
do words really disappear just because we say sorry or do they
stay somewhere deeper
quiet... but present

Because some of them don’t leave.

Some of them remain.

In the way you think.
In the way you hesitate.
In the way something inside you no longer feels the same.

And even now, I still wonder—
when you said those things

did you mean them
or was I simply not supposed to hear them
Three blades.
None of them visible.

But each one leaving a mark. And the strangest part? Even after
all that...
Nothing fell apart

Chapter 13 - Aromatic

Pax Fragilis

A better aftermath

By the time August arrived, life had already started moving again. Not in a dramatic way where everything suddenly becomes perfect, but in the quiet way life usually continues—days passing, conversations happening, routines slowly returning as if nothing had ever interrupted them.

And somewhere in the middle of all that... exam season arrived.

Our physics exam was the next day. Which meant everyone was supposed to be studying. At least that was the plan. In reality, half the class was panicking, the other half was pretending to study, and the rest of us were just trying to survive the syllabus that suddenly felt twice as big.

That evening, my physics book was open in front of me.

But my phone was right beside it.

And like every responsible student during exams...I was looking at the phone instead.

It was Friendship Day.

We had been talking on and off that evening—random things, mostly nonsense. A bit about the exam, a bit about how neither of us actually wanted to study, a bit about food because somehow conversations always drift there when people are bored. At some point, we even started talking about the physics exam like it was a war we had to survive.

Not pass. Survive.

And somewhere between all that, a thought crossed my mind. A stupid one.

The kind that feels small... but your hands still hesitate before typing it.

I stared at the screen for a few seconds.

Then I typed.

“Lemme ask you this... since it’s Friendship Day and all. Will you be my female best friend? our level of Paglami (madness) matches anyway”

For a moment, there was nothing.

Then your reply came.

“Sure.”

Just one word. But it didn’t feel small.

And before I could even process it, another message followed.

“I thought we were already best friends with the kind of things we talk about”

I don’t think I’ve ever smiled at my phone that stupidly before.

And obviously, the only reply my brain could come up with was—

“LESSS GOOOO!!!”

And just like that...it was official.

Best friends.

Tell me— did it feel that simple to you too

or did that moment mean even a little more?

But the stupidity of that night didn’t end there.

At some point, another idea came to my mind.
Matching profile pictures.

Now it sounds small. It is small. But for me, it wasn't something I had ever done before. Not with friends, not with anyone. And somehow, asking that felt more nerve-wracking than the best friend question.

My hands hovered again.

Then I asked. And somehow...
you said yes.

For the first time in my life, I matched profile pictures with someone.
With you.

I remember staring at the screen after changing it, half smiling, half confused at why something so small felt so important. It didn't make sense, but it didn't need to.

It just felt... right.

Of course, there was one small problem.
The physics exam.
The next morning.

Instead of studying, I had spent the entire evening talking nonsense, laughing at messages, discussing food we'd eat after exams, and staring at matching DPs like an absolute idiot.
The result?
Physics and I did not have a good relationship the next day.

I messed it up. Completely. But strangely... I didn't regret it.

Because that night wasn't about physics.
It was about something else.
Something small.
Something simple.
Something that quietly became real somewhere between 8:42
p.m., random conversations, and one stupid question.

We weren't just talking anymore.
We weren't just passing time.
We were besties.

And tell me honestly—when you said “sure” ...did you know
how much that one word meant to me?

Chapter 14 – Yellow Alamanda

Virtual Hug

“I don’t believe in God, but I know you are my saviour.”

*-Sailor Song
Gigi Perez*

There are some nights that don't arrive like nights. They don't fall gently or settle into silence the way they usually do. They come unfinished, like something paused in between, where time slows just enough for your thoughts to grow louder than everything around you, and the quiet begins to feel heavier than noise ever could.

It was one of those nights.

Around ten, maybe eleven. The kind of hour where the world starts withdrawing into itself, lights fading one by one, voices dissolving into distance. I was on the terrace, sitting on the edge—not properly, not safely—just enough to feel how close I was to the drop, just enough to know I shouldn't be there, and yet not enough to move away from it.

And the strangest part is... I don't even remember the exact reason anymore.

I remember the feeling.

Heavy, dull, everywhere, like something inside me had gone quiet in a way that didn't feel peaceful, only empty. The kind of quiet that doesn't calm you, but slowly pulls you deeper into itself.

We had a habit by then. Ten o'clock meant you. It always did. I was always the one who texted first, sometimes even before time, just because waiting felt unnecessary when I already knew who I wanted to talk to.

But that night, my phone stayed in my hand and I couldn't open it.

Not because I didn't want to talk to you, but because I didn't know how to.

What do you even say when you don't understand what's wrong with you?

The calls started coming in. One, then another, then another. I saw them, watched them appear, watched them disappear. I didn't pick up. Maybe because I couldn't speak. Maybe because I was scared that if I tried, something inside me would break in a way I wouldn't be able to gather again.

So I stayed there, sitting on that edge, looking at nothing, thinking everything, doing nothing.

And still... you didn't stop.

At some point, I opened the chat. Just once. Maybe the last time, I thought. Your messages were already there, stacked one after another, not asking anything complicated, not demanding explanations, just... staying.

I replied somehow. Barely. I said I didn't feel right. I didn't even know what to call it.

You asked me if I was depressed.

And I remember typing back that I didn't even know what depression actually was.

And then you explained it.

Patiently.

Like it mattered that I understood what I was feeling, even when I didn't.

But understanding didn't fix it. The feeling stayed. The same weight, the same emptiness, the same strange urge to just disappear from that moment entirely, as if stepping out of it would somehow make everything quieter.

And still, you stayed.

Calls. Messages. Again, and again.
You didn't give up even when I did.

At some point, when nothing seemed to work, you said something different. Not advice, not explanations. Just distraction. You told me to imagine, to take my mind somewhere else, somewhere lighter, somewhere away from whatever I was feeling. Tried imagining you to distract myself, failure. You...

You gave me an option – to imagine you in a different way...ahem...

I could never do that, you're too pure to my brain to do something like that. You're precious

Thoughts about you flooded my mind and slowly, without me realising when exactly it happened, something shifted. Not completely, not suddenly, not in a way that fixed everything—but just enough.

Enough for me to step down from that edge.

Enough for me to move.

Enough for me to stay.
Tell me— did you know that night

you weren't just talking to me
you were holding me together
Because that's what it felt like.

Somewhere between my silence and your persistence, between everything I couldn't say and everything you refused to stop saying, something changed in the way I saw you. You weren't just someone I talked to anymore.

You were someone I reached for.

And then came the part I don't think I'll ever forget.

I questioned if I even mattered to her the slightest.

A response so beautiful, something that stitches my wounds and holds my heart together, till date.

*"You do. How can you not matter? Aren't you my fellow zebra?
Sergeant?*

The best part is that you matter to me and no matter what you say, nothing will change that. You will always matter."

I read that more than once.

Not because I didn't understand it.
But because I needed to believe it.

That someone, somewhere, thought I mattered.

That I wasn't just... there.

It rests on my wallpaper now; I clean the dust off regularly-and maybe for my whole life.

For the first time that night, something inside me didn't feel completely empty. It didn't fix everything, but it made staying feel possible in a way it hadn't before.

We never met that night, not in the way people usually measure closeness, but something still happened that felt real enough to remember. A hug—not physical, not visible, not something anyone else could see—but a version of it that existed somewhere between your words and my silence, and somehow felt real enough to hold onto.

And I did.

Even after the conversation slowed down.

Even after the messages stopped.

Even when I lay down to sleep, staring at the ceiling, still thinking about you.

Because that night didn't end on the terrace.

It followed me back.

And somewhere, quietly, without asking me, something inside me had already decided—

Even if I ever lose everything else, I don't want to lose you.

Do you remember any of it, *Aarohi*?

I never had the courage to say back then, but ...

I love you

Do you still need a reason, why I never moved on?

And around this time, you gave me

My First Flower

A yellow Alamanda

Chapter 15 – Twisted Garden

Horror Enigma

“You were my new Dream”

*-Flynn Rider
Tangled*

By the time the Puja holidays arrived, the days had grown quieter, but something inside me had started to shift in ways I couldn't name. Nothing around me had really changed—school had paused, routines had loosened, time simply stretched—but I found myself carrying you into moments that had nothing to do with you. In between pages I wasn't reading, in conversations I wasn't listening to, in silences I hadn't noticed before, you were just... there.

It wasn't loud. It didn't arrive like a realisation. It stayed the way certain thoughts do—uninvited, but not unwelcome.

Somewhere in the middle of those days, you introduced something new. The haunting session. I never asked what it meant or where it came from. Maybe I didn't need to. Maybe I was too busy stepping into it to question it.

The first time it happened, I was on my terrace, sitting in that same corner I go to when I want distance from everything. The sky was dimming slowly, the air had that stillness to it, and my phone was the only thing holding my attention. The conversation didn't change all at once. It wasn't dramatic. It just... shifted. Quietly. Enough for me to notice.

I remember reading your message longer than I should have, going over the same words again, not because I didn't understand them, but because I felt something I couldn't place. It sat somewhere between discomfort and attachment, something unfamiliar but not entirely unwelcome.

I wasn't crying, but I wasn't okay either.
And still, I didn't leave.

I could have closed the chat, walked away from the moment, let it end before it reached any deeper—but I stayed. Not because I had to. Not because you asked me to. But because, somehow, even that version of you—the one that unsettled me—felt better than not having you there at all.

That is the part I didn't understand.

And maybe that is the part that mattered.

After that, everything returned to normal. We spoke the same way, joked the same way, continued as if nothing had shifted. There was no distance, no silence—just a brief, unspoken awkwardness that faded as quietly as it had appeared. Later that night, I was out with my family, sitting in a crowded restaurant where everything felt louder than it needed to be. People were talking over each other, plates clattered, a match played somewhere in the background and everyone seemed invested in it. India was playing—I remember that much—but I wasn't really watching.

My attention was somewhere else.

With you.

Then, unexpectedly, a video call came. I picked it up without thinking, expecting nothing out of the ordinary, but the moment the screen lit up, something felt off. He was there. Someone from your past. Someone I had only seen once before, and never expected to see like that.

It wasn't just his presence. It was the way he appeared—too casual, almost careless, not even properly dressed for a moment

like that. It felt out of place. I felt out of place. Like I had stepped into something I wasn't meant to witness.

I didn't stay long. I didn't react much. But I left with a feeling I couldn't ignore.

So, I came to you.

Not with accusations. Not with questions. Just with clarity.

I told you I didn't know what that was, that I had no role in it, that I had been added into that call without understanding anything beforehand. And more than anything, I told you I didn't want to be part of something that felt like it could turn messy without reason.

And then...
we kept talking.

Like we always did.

No silence. No break. Just a slight awkwardness that stayed for a moment before disappearing into everything else.

It didn't change anything on the outside.

But inside, something had shifted again.
Not enough to break anything.
Just enough for me to feel it.

Chapter 16 – Roots

I Walked a Lonely Road

“If it’s to meet you, I don’t mind how many times I die”

*-Subaru Natsuki
Re: Zero*

I didn't know love could look like a journey.

Not the kind people write about, soft and effortless, but the real kind—the one that begins with small lies at home, with courage you don't fully understand, with roads you've never taken before, leading to a place that only matters because you are there.

It was Ashtami. The kind of morning that feels sacred even before the sun properly rises, when the air carries something quieter than usual, something that makes the day feel like it's waiting for something important. I woke up early, not because I had to, but because I couldn't stay asleep. Some days, your body doesn't resist waking up because your heart has already been awake for hours.

I got ready simply. A blue kurta, slightly loose, baggy jeans, a scarf I didn't think much about. Nothing that stood out, nothing that tried too hard. From the outside, there was nothing special about me that morning.

But inside, nothing felt ordinary.

The plan felt fragile. The night before, I had told you I'd come. It didn't feel like a big sentence then, just words typed in the quiet, easy to say, easy to believe. But morning has a way of making things real. And real things ask for risk.

I told my parents I was going somewhere nearby, that a few friends were meeting, that my sister would be with me. Small details placed carefully, just enough to sound true. They trusted me. And I carried that trust with me as I rode farther than I ever had before.

Sixteen. Old enough to feel everything. Too young to understand what it costs.

She came with me—my sister, not by blood, but by choice. The kind of bond where questions aren't needed. Even she didn't fully know what I was doing. Maybe I didn't either.

We started riding. At first, it felt normal. Familiar roads, known turns, the kind of distance that doesn't make you think twice. Then slowly, that changed. The roads stretched longer, the surroundings unfamiliar, and that quiet comfort of knowing where you are beginning to fade.

The farthest I had ever gone before that day was twelve kilometres. That day, I crossed thirty-seven. Not all at once, but through hesitation, through wrong turns, through moments where turning back felt easier. I didn't. Because somewhere ahead of me, you existed. And that was enough.

There were checkpoints we weren't supposed to cross, a toll we weren't ready for, roads that didn't feel safe enough to belong to us. We passed through anyway, not fast, not fearless, just committed. The sun rose higher, the heat sharpened, and dust slipped through everything, settling on skin that wasn't prepared for it. My hands burned slightly under the light, the road leaving its mark without asking.

And still, I kept going.

Because in that moment, I wasn't thinking about what it would take. It only knows where it wants to reach.

And mine was simple.

To see you.

That's all.

When we finally reached, nothing looked the way I had imagined. The pandal didn't feel right, or maybe I had already passed it without realising. Certainty disappeared faster than I expected.

I called you. No answer.

Again. Nothing.

Maybe you were asleep, I told myself. Maybe you'd pick up later. It's fine.

It wasn't.

We moved from one pandal to another. Each one full of people, colour, noise—but not you. My sister's patience thinned, her questions sharper now, and I didn't have answers for any of them.

Another call.

Still nothing.

And then, quietly, a thought I didn't want reached me.

What if you don't come?

The distance hadn't stopped me. But doubt did. Not loudly, not dramatically, just enough to sit inside me.

So, I did the only thing left. I called your mother. It felt strange, almost like stepping into something I wasn't meant to, but she answered calmly, listened, and told me where to go. A different pandal. Not far.

The relief was quiet. Sometimes it just loosens something inside your chest.

We rode again. And then I stopped.

Not because I saw you clearly, but because something in me knew. That quiet certainty you can't explain.

You're here.

So, I didn't call again. I didn't rush. I just stood there and let the moment come to me.

And then I saw you.

First a glimpse. Then clearly.

Light green saree. The same white blouse I had once only seen through a screen, now real, now moving, now right in front of me. The sunlight didn't just fall on you—it stayed, as if it had chosen you over everything else around.

For a few seconds, everything else disappeared. The road, the heat, the distance, the risk—none of it mattered anymore. My eyes didn't move. They couldn't.

I had imagined meeting you.

I hadn't imagined this.

We spoke. Not long enough for the journey it took to get there, not enough for everything I had carried with me, but enough to make the moment real. The words themselves weren't important. It was the fact that they existed outside a screen, in a space where neither of us could hide behind time or silence.

I remember looking at you and realising something I hadn't understood before—that presence feels different when it's real. There's no pause between messages, no time to think, no space to rewrite what you feel. It's just you, standing there, exactly as you are.

Time didn't behave properly. It passed too quickly, but not empty. Like something small that still manages to stay.

I met your mother. Your grandmother. There was warmth there, an ease I wasn't expecting, like I wasn't as out of place as I thought I would be. They asked me to stay, to come home, to eat.

For a moment, I wanted to.

But I couldn't.

Because the same distance that brought me there was still waiting for me to return. And somewhere quietly, something already felt incomplete.

Not wrong.

Not disappointing.

Just unfinished.

Like I had reached the end of something I had been building in my head for days, only to realise that the real moment was quieter than I had imagined.

But even then, I didn't regret it.

Because love isn't measured in how long you get. Sometimes it's measured in how far you were willing to go.

We left soon after.

And the return felt different. The same roads, the same distance, but none of it felt the same anymore. It was faster this time, sharper, like my body wanted to undo the time it had taken to reach you. The wind hit harder, the turns came quicker, and my thoughts didn't stay still long enough to understand themselves.

Eighty kilometres per hour on roads I barely knew.

It wasn't fear that was missing.

But because I was thinking too much.

About the way you looked.

About how little time we had.

About how much it took just to stand there for those few minutes.

And somewhere in the middle of that rush, something small came back to me.

The bouquet.

I had bought it that morning, kept it carefully in the scooty's dicky like it mattered.

And then I forgot to give it to you.

It stayed there.

Unseen.

Unsaid.

Like something I felt... but never managed to place in your hands.

When I reached home, everything looked the same. The same walls, the same rooms, the same ordinary life waiting like nothing had happened.

But something had.

Because somewhere between those kilometres, those risks, that one glance, and those few minutes, I had crossed a distance that had nothing to do with roads.

And everything to do with you.

And maybe that's when I understood something I hadn't been able to say before.

I didn't come that far just to see you.

I came that far... because staying away had started to feel harder than the journey itself.

"Men are simple.

If he loves you, he can travel a thousand miles just to see you – even if it's a few seconds"

Chapter 17

Fifteen Minutes

*“It’s so hard to leave—until you leave. And then it’s the
easiest thing in the world.”*

-Paper Towns

That day didn't end when I came back. It stayed, not clearly, not in a way I could return to whenever I wanted, but in fragments. The details slipped first. What we said, how you reacted, the exact way you looked at me—it all started fading faster than I expected. I tried holding onto it, replaying it in my head, but it wouldn't stay. Only the feeling did.

I remember missing you, and that felt strange because you had just been there. It wasn't absence in the usual sense. It was the kind that comes after something ends too soon, when your mind hasn't accepted that it's already over. Fifteen minutes. That's all I got. After everything it took to reach you, after all that distance and time, it ended in something that small. I didn't know whether to be grateful for it or quietly disappointed that it wasn't more.

We talked that day, I'm sure of it, but now when I try to remember, there's nothing I can hold onto. Just a vague sense that something meaningful happened, without anything solid left behind. It's strange how something can matter that much and still not remain.

That evening, I went out again with my family, moving through pandals like everyone else, lights and noise filling the spaces between thoughts. Somewhere along the way, without planning it, we passed through your town again. I recognised it before I realised why. The roads felt familiar in a way they hadn't before, like I had already placed something there earlier that day.

And then I saw it. That place.

I didn't say anything, but my sister looked at me and smiled in a way that felt too knowing to be random. For a moment, I actually hoped. Not realistically, not in a way that made sense, but still hoped that I might see you again, even if it was just for a second,

even if nothing came out of it. But nothing happened, and we kept moving.

I think a part of me wanted to stay there. Not go back to everything that existed before I saw you, not return to normal so quickly. Just remain a little longer, maybe walk with you, maybe turn those few minutes into something that felt complete. But life doesn't pause like that. It moves forward whether you're ready or not.

That night, I slept thinking maybe the next day would feel different, like something would continue from where it left off. It didn't. Nothing obvious changed, and yet the days didn't feel empty either. We talked more than before. Messages came faster, replies didn't wait, and conversations stretched into moments where we probably should have been paying attention to everything else around us.

Somewhere in between, I started noticing things I hadn't before. Small things. The way I checked my phone more often without thinking, the way I stayed in conversations longer than I needed to, the way I started waiting without admitting to myself that I was waiting. Even the smallest things began to carry weight. I remember standing in front of a pani puri stall one day and not eating, not because I didn't want to, but because you hadn't gotten to that day. It didn't make sense, but it stayed with me anyway.

There were other things too, quieter ones. I started remembering details you mentioned casually, things you didn't expect anyone to hold onto. I found myself showing up in small ways, bringing something when it mattered to you, even if you never asked. I don't know when that became natural, or why I didn't question it. It just happened.

Maybe that's the part I can't reconstruct anymore. The exact days, the exact conversations—they've blurred. But the way I started being there, the way I adjusted without noticing, that stayed clear in a way the memories didn't.

At the same time, life outside of all this didn't stop. Midterms came, and with them, the part of me that had always existed before you. The version of me that focused, that pushed, that didn't let things slip. It felt like stepping back into something familiar without leaving anything behind. I wasn't just the version of me that stayed in your chats anymore, and I wasn't less of that either. Somehow, both existed at once. *Schrödinger, was it?*

The exams were going we well. Yours too. Everything, on the surface, looked steady, like things were moving the way they were supposed to.

But even within that steadiness, there was something I couldn't ignore. Not something I could point to, nor I could explain, just a quiet understanding that had settled somewhere inside me.

Just enough that I knew—
those fifteen minutes hadn't ended when I left.

Chapter 18 – Midnight Flower

00:00

*“I wish I had met you sooner.
Maybe a better past, but not a better life”*

*-Asmit Biswas
Author*

November arrived quietly. Not in a way that announces itself, but in a way, you feel without noticing at first. The air had started changing—lighter in the afternoons, colder by evening. Autumn was almost over, and winter hadn't fully arrived yet. Everything felt like it was in between. And somewhere in that in-between, my birthday came.

Exams were going on. One after another, the same routine repeating itself—papers, revision, just enough sleep, and then again. Birthdays had never really meant much to me, not in the way they seem to for others. I wasn't used to being wished, not properly. Most years, it stayed within home. A few messages, maybe one or two from people who remembered. Nothing more. Last year was worse. Class 10. An entire class, and almost no one remembered. Just two people. Two friends who meant something back then. And somehow, even that had felt like a privilege.

So, I didn't expect anything this time either.

But this year... was different.

At exactly 00:00, you wished me. Not late, not casually, not something sent when you remembered later. Exactly when the day began. And then it didn't stop. Stories started appearing, one after another. Five different accounts, all unique, all thought through in a way I wasn't used to. I remember just staring at them, not reacting immediately, not even fully understanding what I was feeling.

I don't know how I didn't have tears in my eyes. Maybe I was too surprised. Maybe I didn't know what to do with that much attention all at once. There were more wishes, more messages, things I wasn't used to receiving. Someone even sang a mix of Korean and English birthday song for me, and I remember just sitting there, listening to it, not knowing whether to laugh or just stay quiet and take it in.

For once, it didn't feel like just another day. It felt like I was being noticed.

Somewhere in the middle of all that, I knew there was something else. Shel and K had gotten me a gift. I couldn't receive it that day. Distance had always been there. The next day, they dropped it at a shop I knew, sending it through their school bus. I still missed it. By the time I came back from my exam, the shop had already closed. It felt almost stupid; how close it was and still not in my hands. I had to wait another day.

When I finally got it, I recorded my reaction without planning to. I just wanted to remember it. And when I opened it, I couldn't hide anything even if I tried. The excitement, the way my face changed, the way I couldn't stay still—it was all there.

It was an RC drift car.

And yeah, maybe I was too old for it.

But how can a XY chromosome not love toys?

The best part wasn't even the gift itself. It was the fact that you remembered. I had only mentioned it once, casually, like something that didn't even matter. I didn't ask for it. We didn't talk about it again. But you remembered.

And that stayed with me more than anything else.

The exams went on. Most of them went well. Except chemistry. That one was right after my birthday, and I messed it up badly. Not because I didn't know anything, but because I couldn't bring myself back to that usual focus. My head wasn't there. I was still somewhere between those wishes, those stories, that moment of being seen in a way I hadn't been before.

And maybe that's what made it different.

Not the day itself.

But the way it stayed after.

Because for the first time, it didn't feel like I had to wait to be remembered.

I already was.

And somewhere in that quiet realization, a thought stayed longer than everything else.

Damn God...

why hadn't we met earlier?

Why hadn't we even crossed paths... even once?

Why did it take this long for us to exist in the same place, at the same time, and finally notice each other?

Maybe if we had met even a year earlier...

or a few years ago...

we both might have had a better past.

A better life.

Maybe we wouldn't have had to go through everything we did—

everything we never talk about.

Or maybe... we had to break first, just to meet each other like this.

Chapter 19 - Momijigari

The Half Magnets

*"It's a lonely thing;
To protect a breakable heart."*

-atticus

November had started settling in by then. Exams were ending one by one, and for the first time in days, I had time that didn't feel rushed. My last paper was done. Hers wasn't. She still had biology.

The night before, we had talked. Not like we usually did. There was something heavier in it, something she shared about someone close to her—something I knew wasn't mine to carry into words. I didn't have answers. I just stayed. Listened. Tried to be there in the only way I could. And even after the conversation ended, it didn't leave me that easily.

The next day, I did something without thinking too much about it. I took my scooty out, used whatever money I had, and got what she liked. Chocolate Ice cream. Two of them. And two Maazas, because K would be with her, and it didn't feel right bringing something for just one person. Her bus stop wasn't far from my place. So, I waited.

When the bus arrived, I expected her to get down. Instead, I saw both of them running straight to a nearby shop. They didn't see me. I followed, walked into the same shop, stood right behind her, and for a second, I just watched her exist in a moment that had nothing to do with me. And then I pulled her ponytail.

She turned around like something was wrong. For a second, she didn't recognise me. Then I lifted my helmet slightly. And she did.

I handed her the ice cream. The Maaza. Simple things. But somehow, they didn't feel small.

And then there was the bracelet. I had bought it the day before. Two halves of a heart, held together by magnets. I didn't say much while giving it to her. I just held her hand... and made her wear it.

It stayed there.

The next day, school took us to Rohini. A trip. Groups were made, teachers assigned, everything organised the way it always is. Except I wasn't in her group. We could have gone together. But we didn't. At least not from the beginning.

For a while, it was just routine. Walking with my group. Acting like the group monitor I was supposed to be. Staying where I was meant to.

Until I wasn't.

I found her somewhere in between all of that. She was eating Momo. A teacher was sitting nearby. He offered me one. I refused at first. I wasn't supposed to eat. But she looked at me, with a weird look on her and offered me from her plate. Can I ever ignore her? No.

And that was enough.

I took one.

Later, we walked away. With permission. But still... away. Just the three of us. There wasn't anything planned. We just moved. Talked. Stayed.

And then we saw the flowers.

Not close. Not easy.

A little too far. A little too high. The kind of place where you're not really supposed to go.

I still went.

Climbed over, not really thinking about where I was stepping, just focused on reaching them. For a moment, it felt like one wrong step would be enough for everything to go wrong. But I didn't stop.

I pulled them out. More than I needed. Came back down like nothing had happened.

I handed them to her.

And to K.

Didn't keep any for myself.

At that time, it didn't feel like anything.

Just something I did.

Until we were seen.

Not directly.

By the time I got back to the bus, the feeling had already started building. That quiet kind of fear that doesn't show immediately, but stays somewhere in the background.

When I entered, my group in-charge looked at me.

"Where were you?"

I answered simply. Somewhere around. Nothing specific.

She didn't react immediately.

"Always with A-----, Keep it up!"

I just looked away.

"You had flowers, right?"

For a second, everything came back at once. The place we went. The fact that we weren't really supposed to be there. The flowers. The people who saw.

"I threw them away" I said.

She looked at me for a moment. Then smiled in a way that didn't believe me, but didn't question me either.

“Ha-ha, Mujhe to pata hi nhi ! Go sit”

The bus was louder than it needed to be. People talking, noticing, turning something small into something bigger. For a moment, it felt like things might go out of hand.

But they didn't.

Gosh why were you guys shouting her name!?

The day stayed what it was. Awesome!

That same evening, I had to leave. An emergency. Kolkata. The train moved through the night, and somewhere between the noise and the movement, we talked, talked for five hours straight. Remember you did not get permission to come over to my house? *Sighs.*

The next day I reached, couldn't talk to her because I had my cousins come over.

But who can stop us? We eventually found some time to spare at night. Kept texting and texting about random stuff.

Out of nowhere this came from you, really natural but something else followed up.

Him: *“I'm going to the washroom.”*

“I'll be back in a minute.”

Her: *"Okay."*

"I'll go to the washroom too."

Her: *"Wow now I am getting washroom warnings too!"*

Him: *"Yea?"*

Her: *"people in love..."*

I felt it was a poignant tone, before I even asked an information was added, she always told her ex-boyfriend whatever she was doing or for whatever reason there was her absence so he got the idea of being ignored.

Where did I go wrong? What sins have I committed to never deserve such love from you?

And we did talk more.

Not for long.

But enough.

Looking back at it now, nothing about those days felt like they were leading anywhere.

It just felt like things were where they were supposed to be.

And maybe that's why I didn't notice it then.

That sometimes, the moments that feel the simplest...

are the ones you return to the most.

Chapter XX - Fall

The End of Beginning

"I had all and then the most of you, some and now none of you."

-Lord Huron
The Night We Met

That day didn't begin like something that would stay. It felt like any other day in the middle of exams, the kind you don't think twice about. And maybe that's why it caught me off guard.

I saw you crying. For the first time.

Nothing around us stopped. The class continued, voices moved, people gathered around you before I could even process what I was seeing. But something in me didn't move with it. It stayed there, fixed on you, trying to understand what I was supposed to do.

I didn't walk to you. Not because I didn't want to, but because I didn't know if I had the right to. You were already surrounded, held in a way that felt natural, like those people belonged in that moment with you. And I didn't know if I did.

So, I stayed back. Not far enough to ignore you, not close enough to reach you.

And I cried. But I lacked tears.

Quietly, without anyone noticing, the kind that doesn't make a sound but still leaves you exhausted. I hadn't cried like that in a long time. I thought I had learned how to control it, how to keep things where they belong. But something about seeing you like that didn't give me a choice.

Maybe it wasn't just about that moment.
Maybe it had already started before.

The day before, I saw someone I used to like, or maybe was just clung to. Not in a way that brought anything back, not in a way that made me want to return to something old, but in a way that

reminded me of something unfinished. I didn't speak to her. I didn't try. But the feeling stayed—not of her, but of how she left. No explanation, no closure, just something that ended without telling me it had.

I realised I don't even remember her properly anymore. Not her eyes, not her voice, not anything clear. Just the feeling she left behind. And maybe that's all she is now—a reminder of what it feels like to not be chosen, to not be explained to, to be left with questions that never get answered.

And maybe that's why it affected me more than it should have. You asked me why I cared. Why it mattered. I didn't have an answer that made sense. Maybe I should've left it there. But I didn't. I texted her. She didn't reply.

It shouldn't have mattered. But when your mind is already unsettled, even small things don't stay small.

The next morning, I didn't wait for you. Something I always did without thinking. I just walked to class. At the time, it felt like nothing. Later, it didn't.

When I got home, I asked you why you had cried. You replied. You sent voice messages. And I told you I'd listen later. You deleted them.

It happened in a moment, but it stayed longer than it should have. Like something I wasn't meant to hear, something I lost without even trying to keep.

At night, I tried to talk to you. Not slowly, not carefully. I just wanted to reach you before the distance I was feeling became real. But it already was.

Your replies were short. Not rude, not cold in an obvious way. Just... not you.

And then you said you felt sleepy.

And when I told you I wanted to talk, you said you didn't feel like talking.

That one line stayed longer than everything else that day.
It's strange how something can take months to build, and still feel like it slips in a single moment. Not gone, not broken, just... out of reach.

I wrote everything I wanted to say, even after you went offline.
Not because I knew it would fix anything, but because I didn't know what else to do with everything I was holding.

And somewhere in that silence, something became clear in a way I didn't want it to.

It wasn't just that I saw you cry.

It wasn't just that I wasn't there properly.

It was that when it mattered the most, I couldn't reach you.

And that did something to me.

Because I had already started caring about you in a way that didn't stay limited to conversations. It was there in the way I waited, the way I noticed, the way your day quietly became part of mine. And standing there, not being able to step into your world when it hurt, made me realise how much of you I had already held onto.

You weren't alone that day. You had people beside you, holding you, crying with you. I saw that. I knew that. *"Diamonds", indeed.*

But how do I tell you I cried too?

Not beside you. Not where you could see.

Just somewhere between wanting to be the one you reached for... and realising I wasn't.

Was it the end?

I don't think things end like that. Not in a single day. Not in a single sentence.

But that night, for the first time, I understood something I hadn't before.

Loving someone doesn't always mean you get to be there when it matters.

And sometimes, the hardest part isn't the distance.

It's standing right there... and still not being able to reach them.

But was it the end or the just the end of beginning?

Chapter 21 – Winter's Arrival

Dawn

*"Every new beginning comes
from other beginning's end."*

-Seneca

Nothing ever ended. It just stopped looking the way it used to, and for a while, I mistook that for distance.

The tech fest came like any other school event—announced casually, almost forgettable. Four events, spread across two days. Nothing about it felt like something that would stay.

We weren't even in the same team for most of it.

Except for coding.

Getting you to participate was harder than anything that followed. You refused more than once, like you had already decided you didn't belong there. In the end, it wasn't me who convinced you.

It was the teacher.

And somehow, out of everything, we ended up together for the one event that mattered.

The first day passed quietly. Quiz, presentation—everything worked, we won, and it didn't feel like something worth holding on to.

But the second day slowed everything down.
Coding.

The first problem was easy. The second one wasn't. Not because it was difficult—but because I couldn't stay steady anymore. Time slipped, thoughts blurred, and somewhere in between trying and failing, I lost control in a way I didn't understand.

It wasn't panic.

It was quieter than that.

Like something inside me just... gave way.

And then—

you held my hand.

Not suddenly.

Not like a reaction.

Like you had decided it without needing to say it.

Your fingers wrapped around mine, firm but gentle, like you knew exactly how much I needed that moment. And somehow, everything that felt scattered began to settle. Not fully. Not instantly. But enough.

And then you did it again.

Every time I drifted, you caught me.

Not hesitating.

Not checking who was watching.

Just holding it like it belonged there.

That was the part I couldn't understand.

Because I had seen you around others. Careful. Composed. A version of you that never crossed certain lines, that always stayed within what was “right.”

But here—
with me—
you were different.
Softer.
Closer.
Warmer in a way that didn't feel accidental anymore.

You handed me your water bottle without asking. Stayed beside me without creating distance. Held my hand like it didn't need permission.

Tell me...

what changes you?
Does something stop you when others are around?
Does something hold you back from being like this?

Because when it's just us—
you don't hold back at all.

You become someone who takes care of me so easily, so naturally,
like it was always meant to be this way.

And I don't know when that started.
I don't know how it became so effortless for you.

But I felt it.
Every single time your hand found mine.
We finished it somehow.

We won.
There was noise after that, people talking, things happening—but
none of it stayed. It all faded into something distant, something
unimportant.

Because the only thing that remained clear was that moment.

Your hand in mine.

Again.

And again.

By the end of it, the tech fest didn't feel like an event anymore.

It felt like a different universe.

Something quiet, something unspoken—

something that didn't need to be explained to be real.

Chapter 22 – Evergreen

The Arc of Winter

I. Frieren's Trio

7th December

We didn't go to school that day. It was planned—me, you, and K. One day out, one day for the exhibition. Even getting permission had taken effort, and somewhere in between all that, I realised that if K hadn't been allowed, you probably wouldn't have come either. Not alone. Not that far.

That morning, I woke up and the first thing I thought about wasn't the plan, not even what I had to do—it was you. I knew you didn't have network. So, before anything else, before even getting ready, I recharged your phone. Quietly. Without telling you. It just felt right to do it.

You reached before I was ready. No message, no timing—just suddenly there, asking me to come pick you up. I rushed out, still trying to catch up with the fact that you were already here.

On the way back home, while we were walking, I asked you why you didn't text me when you left. You said you didn't have network. I told you, casually, that I had already recharged your phone. You paused for a second and said you thought your father had done it. Then you just said thank you. Softly. Like you didn't expect it, like you didn't fully understand it either.

That was it.

But I remember it.

When you both came home, it didn't feel the way I had imagined. Not bad, just... unfamiliar. A little quiet. You moved around, checking things, opening my devices, going through my gallery

like you were looking for something. K stayed calmer, balancing the space, while you stayed restless, playful but not settled.

It felt like the day hadn't started yet.

So we left.

We went out, moved from place to place, ate here and there, but most of it didn't stay. It felt like the day was still waiting to become something. And in between all of that, there were small things happening that I didn't realise the weight of at that moment.

Every time we crossed a road, you held my sleeve.

Not my hand. Just the edge of my shirt.

Lightly. Like it didn't mean anything.

But it kept happening.

And I remember it now more clearly than anything else from that part of the day.

Later, when we were walking through the lanes near my home, I was holding your bag. I didn't think about it. It just felt natural.

People were looking, but I didn't care.

And then—

we saw our principal.

Right there. Close enough to recognise.

For a second, everything froze.

I was standing there, holding your bag, looking straight at her, and in that moment, it felt like we had been caught doing something we weren't supposed to—even though we hadn't.

And then we ran.

All three of us, without thinking, just running like kids trying to escape something that didn't even matter. I was still holding your bag while running, and I don't think I've ever felt that mix of panic and laughter at the same time.

We found those small toy guns filled with drinks. The drinks were horrible, so we threw them out and filled them with water instead. And without planning it, everything changed.

We started running again.

But this time, not because we were scared.

You sprayed water at me first, and I chased you without thinking. You ran, I caught up, and it just kept going—again and again, like we had forgotten everything else. There was no awkwardness left, no distance, nothing holding us back anymore.

You were laughing properly now. Not the controlled kind, not the one you show around others—just real.

And that's when it finally felt like the day had started.

K slowly drifted out of that space, the way it happens when two people unknowingly create their own moment. Not intentionally. Just naturally.

Time moved faster after that. By the time we realised, it was already time for you to leave. The bus came, and just like that, the day ended before it ever felt complete. I walked you till the end, watched you leave, and came back with something I couldn't fully explain.

It wasn't a perfect day. Most of it didn't feel special while it was happening. But somewhere between small unnoticed gestures, the way you held my sleeve without thinking, the way I held your

bag without realising, the way we ran and laughed like nothing else mattered—

something changed again.

Quietly.

II. The Hero's Party

We called it an exhibition, but those two days felt like something much bigger than just a school project. For the first time, I wasn't late for anything, and still everything else around me felt like it was falling apart in slow motion.

Our group had seven people—me, you, K, and four others. On paper, it looked complete, but in reality, it was scattered. Some people were serious, some barely involved, and somehow, as always, I ended up being one of the ones doing most of the work.

That day, two of our teammates had already reached. I had gone outside to check on some materials when I saw you, K, and that senior coming. He was more connected to K, so I didn't really care. The moment I saw you, I walked up and took your bag without even asking. It had already become a habit. I still remember it clearly—a small black bag with a little clutcher clung to it.

We started walking back towards my house, and on the way, there was that small road, barely a few steps wide. Usually, you would just hold my sleeve while crossing, lightly, like it didn't mean anything. But that day I didn't wait. I held your hand first and we crossed together. It was such a small thing, hardly a few seconds, but it felt different enough for me to remember it even now.

On the way, you kept repeating the same thing again and again, in that exact tone I still remember,

“Tum mujhe chips kharidke doge na yeh wala?”

And my goshhhhhhhh you were so cute and adorable

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

You said it more than once, like you already knew I wouldn't say no. And honestly, I never could.

When we reached home, things didn't settle the way I expected. It wasn't exciting or smooth—it was awkward in a quiet way.

Then the work began.

We were building a plasma cannon. Not just a model, something that actually had to work. Me and the senior handled most of the main setup. We carried tanks to the grill shop, got them cut, brought them back, fixed pipes, joined connections, assembled everything step by step. And just when things started looking complete, it failed.

The flamethrower didn't work.

At first, I thought it was a small issue. I opened it, fixed it, tried again. It worked alone, but the moment I connected it to the pipe, it broke. The pressure was too much. I kept trying again and again, opening it, fixing it, testing it, but every time it failed.

In between all this, the others decided to go out for ice cream. I told you to wait, just stay for a bit, but K grabbed your hand and pulled you along, joking, “Asmit got jealous, that's why he's not letting you go.” And just like that, you left with them.

I won't lie, that moment got to me. I didn't react loudly, but felt something inside. So, when you came back, I didn't talk to you properly. I just focused on the work and avoided you. You came close, sat right in front of me, tried to talk, kept teasing me, distracting me, not letting me focus at all. Anyone else would've thought it was normal, but I knew you were trying to break through that silence.

At one point, you were so close that I could barely even avoid you properly, and someone from the side noticed and said it in that teasing tone, like we needed "alone time." I brushed it off, but it did make things feel different for a moment. Even that guy sitting on the sofa was just watching us, almost smiling at what was happening, and I didn't even realise it until later.

Meanwhile, the project was still failing.

We went out again to fix it. We went to a TV repair shop, then a grill shop, then even a garage, trying to find someone who could fix it. Nothing worked. Everywhere we went, the answer was the same. No solution.

At some point, while trying to fix it, I hurt my finger badly. It was burning, painful, but I didn't stop. I kept trying.

When food was served, everyone gathered. But you didn't eat. You asked where I was. When my mom said I might be on the terrace, you came looking. You were the only one who did. When I came back from inside, trying to act normal, you immediately noticed something was wrong. *You held my hand and told me not to hurt myself again.* That moment I cherish. Not because you held my hand, but because you were the only one who cared enough to notice.

We tried fixing it again with threads, then wires, but everything kept failing. The pressure was too much; the structure wasn't stable. Nothing held.

Later, we went out again to get parts, and this time you were on my scooter. I drove faster than I ever had before, almost touching 90. I don't know why I did that, maybe just because you were there. And for someone who always said you don't hold anyone while sitting behind at two-wheeler, you were holding me that day. Do you remember it?

By the end of the day, we had nothing. The project still wasn't working. But when it was time to drop you, we reached that big road—the highway. This wasn't a small crossing anymore. It was long. And this time, you didn't hold my sleeve. I held your hand. The whole way across. I didn't let go. Friends behind us were teasing, making sounds, but it didn't matter.

The next working day was worse.
The deadline.

The project still wasn't ready. I was running everywhere trying to fix things. We somehow received the flame thrower. My mom drove all the way to school to drop it. Remember how we both ran as fast as we could in excitement and took it from her, and moments before you were trying to tie my hairs with a ribbon to distract me from the tension.

And guess what happen again?
Life showed its true colour, the flame gun failed again.
It ripped apart.

I tried fixing it again and the me being me dropped the screws somewhere while returning to the classroom even though you gave your handkerchief to keep the small parts in.

Later you went down to search for them and got scolded badly. When you came back, you were crying. And at that moment, nothing else mattered. I sat beside you and just placed my hand on your head, slowly calming you down. I didn't say much. I just stayed there. Others tried to cover us from people staring, and I realised how much that moment meant.

Even then, the project wasn't working.

And then, somehow—

it worked.

The ignition happened. The sound was loud enough for everyone to notice. People turned, teachers came, everyone started looking. It felt unreal, like everything we had been struggling with finally came together at once.

You ran to me.

We held hands again.

We were laughing, jumping like kids, like nothing else mattered in that moment. Just like we were playing Ringa-Ringa-Roses! Finally, we succeeded.

Although I burned my fingers again. Well, I don't know if I was always this dumb or became when I fell in love with you.

You held my hand again!!!

Scolding me in front of everyone. Duh.
Although I enjoyed it.

And in between I went out to get your lunch box and I got scolded
by the vice-principal. And this time I didn't enjoy.
I still remember you brought chilli paneer? Isn't it?

We didn't win.
But honestly, it didn't matter.
Because what we built wasn't just the project.

Through all the chaos, the failure, the jealousy, the anger, the
effort—
we didn't drift.

We stayed together, worked hard and achieved our goal.

And somewhere between you holding my sleeve...
and then holding my hand—

something was different now.

III. The November – December Theory

The months where everyone and everything drifts apart.
Relations loosen, sometimes tear, and you lose the person you got
closest to that year.

They call it the November–December theory.

I didn't believe it—until it almost reached us.

It wasn't a big moment, just a conversation that slipped. You were
already upset about something else, and in between, I lost the
rhythm for a second. That was enough. Your words came out
sharp, heavier than they should have been, telling me to stop, to
listen, to just go away.

I didn't argue. I just said sorry and stepped back.

Silence followed. And for the first time, it felt real—that quiet fear
that maybe this is how it starts. Not with an ending, just with
distance.

I waited.

Then I came back with something simple—are you okay?

You said sorry.

And just like that, the theory lost its hold. Because maybe it isn't
about losing someone. Maybe it's about reaching the edge where
you could—and choosing not to fall.

We didn't drift. We came back. Stronger than before.

Everyone makes mistake, its forgivable if you surrender.
Till I became something I hated the most.

Chapter 23 – A Pesticide

The Ghoul

*“I promised to protect her from the world...
I never thought I’d have to protect her from me.”*

-Asmit Biswas
Author

23rd January

The day of Saraswati Puja, the goddess of knowledge and art.

The very day I became what I had always hated the most—a ghoul. Not the kind from stories, not something with claws or blood, but something worse. Something human. Someone who hurts the very person they once promised to protect, and still keeps going.

The day had been normal. Too normal for what it would turn into. We started talking in the evening like we always did, easily, comfortably, without effort. You told me about your day, the small things, the details only I got to hear, and I listened the way I always did, like it mattered.

Then the topic shifted.

Your dreams.

I kept reading, kept replying, kept acting like everything was fine, but somewhere in between your words, something inside me started to twist. It wasn't loud, it wasn't clear, it didn't even make sense to me at that moment. It was just there, slowly growing, like a thought I didn't want to admit.

You were speaking about your future.

And for some reason... it hurt.

Not because of you.

But because of something inside me that I didn't understand.

And instead of dealing with it, instead of letting it pass, I held onto it. I let it sit, let it grow, let it turn into something darker than it should have ever become.

After a few hours, I decided to joke.

At least, that's what I told myself.

I said I wasn't the only one texting you from my account. At first, it was light, something that could still be stopped, something that could still be harmless.

But I didn't stop.

You warned me. You told me that if it was a prank, I should stop. You even said you would forgive me. You gave me a way out without making it difficult.

And I ignored it.

I said the other person was your ex. I said he was paying me. I said I would give him my account so he could talk to you.

Even now, I don't understand how I said those things so easily, how I chose the exact words that would hurt you the most. I knew your past. I knew what that name meant to you. I knew the things you had gone through.

And still... I said it.

That's when I realised something later.

A ghoul doesn't attack strangers.

It feeds on the ones closest.

And that night—

I fed on you.

You still believed in me.

Even then.

You said I wasn't that shallow. That I would never do something like this. You held onto a version of me that I had already started breaking.

And I kept going.

I don't know why.

I just didn't stop.

And when I finally said it was a joke, it didn't fix anything.

Because something had already broken.

You didn't shout. You didn't overreact. You just changed. Quietly.

The kind of quiet that says more than words ever could. You asked me who I was talking as, whether it was me or him, and when I said it was me, you said you couldn't trust me anymore, that maybe I didn't care enough, that you didn't even know what to believe.

That was the moment it hit me.

Not slowly.

Not gently.

All at once.

I had hurt you.

Not by accident.

Not unknowingly.

But by choice.

When you asked me to explain, I had nothing. No excuse felt real enough to say out loud. Because the truth was simple, and that's what made it worse.

Somewhere inside me, I had wanted to hurt you.

Maybe for a moment.
Maybe without thinking.
Maybe because I was hurting too.

But none of that changed what I had done.
You told me we shouldn't talk until you felt better. Just like that.
No drama, no fight, just distance. And suddenly, something that
had become a part of my everyday life disappeared.
Talking to you wasn't something I planned.
It just happened.
Every day.
For months.

And now it didn't.
I still texted sometimes. Not expecting replies. Just asking if you
were okay. Because I didn't know how to stop caring, even when I
knew I had become the reason you needed space.

The next day, you changed your display picture.
And for a moment, everything stopped.

I don't have the words for how you looked. Even now, my heart
reacts to that picture before I can stop it. And for a second, I
forgot everything else—what I had done, what had happened—
until it all came back again.

And then you texted.

So casually, like nothing had happened.

You asked if I was home. Said you were nearby. Asked if I could
come.

And I went.

I didn't think twice. I left my tuition halfway, bought two ice creams on the way, and rode as fast as I could just to reach you.

When I saw you again, everything felt normal.

Too normal.

We talked, we walked, we laughed, we took pictures like nothing had broken two nights before. For a little while, it felt like everything was okay again.

But it wasn't.

You hadn't forgotten.

You were just choosing not to hold it in that moment.

And somehow, that hurt more.

Because even after I had been cruel, you were still kind.

Even after I became the one who hurt you—

you didn't become the same.

When I left that day, it didn't feel like things were fixed. It felt like something had been covered, not healed. Because the truth hadn't changed.

I had crossed a line.

And I couldn't go back from it.

Because the worst part wasn't losing you.
It wasn't the silence.
It wasn't even the fear of what could have happened.

The worst part was knowing that I had become the very thing I
always hated.

The one-eyed ghoul.
Not because I didn't care.

But because I cared—and still chose to hurt you.
And the most terrifying part?

It didn't leave.

It stayed inside me.

Quiet.
Waiting.

And later—
I proved it again. I fed on your insecurities.

Chapter 24 – Red Roses

Soulmates

“You are my soulmate after all.”

-Aarohi

February didn't end with a moment. It faded into March the way evenings fade into night—quietly, without asking for attention, without announcing that something had changed.

Our final exams stood in between us and everything else. They were supposed to matter the most. And they did, in a way. We studied, we revised, we pretended to focus... but somewhere between formulas and notes, something else had already taken over.

We had always talked a lot. Messages that stretched for hours, conversations that refused to end. But calls... calls were different. Calls felt closer. And for the longest time, we had stayed away from that closeness, as if both of us knew it would change something.

Until it did.

The night before the computer exam, we got on a call to study. That was the plan. Just studying. Nothing more. And yet, that call stretched... and stretched... until hours passed without either of us noticing. Three hours. Maybe more. Some part of it was studying. Most of it was not. It didn't matter. What mattered was that for the first time, silence between us didn't feel empty. It felt shared.

After that, something changed.

Calls became normal. Not rare. Not special. Just... us. Every day. Hours slipping by like minutes, conversations flowing without structure, without purpose, without needing one. Four hours. Five hours. Sometimes more. It stopped feeling like we were finding time to talk. It felt like we were building our days around it.

And then came something even more unexpected.

A mistake.

A video call, pressed by accident.

It could have ended there. A quick cut. An apology. A laugh. But it didn't. Instead, we stayed. At first, just ceilings. Half-frames. Shy angles. A hesitation neither of us admitted.

"Show me your face," I said.

"You first."

I did.

And then you did.

Forty-five minutes. Maybe less. Maybe more. I don't remember the exact time. I only remember that it didn't feel like the first time. It felt like something that had been waiting to happen.

After that, you said you had work. Folding clothes. Something simple. Something ordinary. You said we should switch back to a normal call.

But I didn't want that.

"Don't. Just keep the phone there... I'll stay."

Even if you didn't talk. Even if you were busy. Even if there was nothing to say.

I just wanted to look at you.

I love looking at you.

That line stayed somewhere. Quietly. Like a truth I didn't fully understand yet.

March wasn't just about exams ending. It was about time opening up.

After the exams, we were free. And we used that freedom in the simplest way possible—we talked. More than before. Longer than before. As if we were making up for all the time we hadn't taken earlier.

Then came those strange in-between school days. Activities, events, things that didn't really matter on paper... but somehow mattered because we were there together.

One morning, I woke up to your text. You weren't going to school.

So, I didn't go either.

I went back to sleep.

And when I woke up again... we were talking.

It was that simple.

Other days, we did go. No-fire cooking. Random activities. Empty classrooms. Your friends absent. My presence becoming constant. Somehow, no matter how groups were formed, no matter what the activity was... we ended up together. One of the days we got our picture clicked while receiving the awards.

Matter of fact that our school has more pictures of us two than any of the pictures we have clocked together in outings.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Like it wasn't even a coincidence anymore.

Like something was quietly making sure of it.

And somewhere in the middle of all this...

March stopped being just a month.

It became preparation.

Because I knew your birthday was coming.

And I didn't want to give you something ordinary. Not something bought in a hurry. Not something forgettable. I wanted to give you something that would carry time inside it. Effort. Thought. Something that would feel like me.

So, I started working on it.

Not at home. I couldn't. It had to stay hidden. So, I went somewhere else. Hours outside. Excuses at home. Questions I avoided answering. Small scoldings that I accepted without defending myself.

Because I knew why I was doing it.

Origami flowers. Red spider lilies. Your favourite. Folding paper until my fingers hurt, then doing it again because it didn't look

perfect yet. Building a box that wasn't just a box. Lights, photos, small pieces of things that meant something only because they were connected to you.

I gave you hints, just enough for you to not figure it out.
A bomb.

At one point, I had a different plan. Something bigger. Inline skates. Something you wanted but didn't have. I had saved for it. Quietly. Slowly. Piece by piece.

And then life did what it does.

Something came up. Something I couldn't ignore. The money had to go somewhere else. Not into a gift. Not into something beautiful. Just... away.

So, I changed the plan.

Not because I wanted to.

Because I had to.

And maybe that's when I realised something—love isn't about how expensive something is. It's about how much of yourself you leave inside it.

So, I chose something else.

Something convenient. Something thoughtful.

Wireless earphones.

Because I had seen you struggle with the wired ones. Because I knew you'd use them every day. Because I knew you'd probably lose them someday, so I found ones that could be tracked.

Not perfect.

But yours.

And somehow, that felt enough.

By the time March reached its end...
everything was ready.
I didn't know what the day would become.
I didn't know how much it would change.

I didn't know that somewhere ahead... a single day was waiting to rewrite everything that had come before it.

All I knew was this
I was late.
Again.

Final Arc – The Spring

Three Magical Words

*“No matter which love line, what time, or where I am,
I will always love you.”*

-Asmit Biswas
Author

30th March

the best day of my life.

I don't remember when I finally fell asleep that night, because sleep didn't come easily when my mind refused to quiet down, when every thought kept circling back to you, replaying moments that hadn't even happened yet, imagining conversations I hadn't spoken, and holding onto a day that hadn't even begun. Thoughts of the next day, what to talk about, things that might happen, things that might not. I had been working on something for you, something small in the eyes of the world but something that carried every bit of care I had quietly gathered over time, and maybe that is why the night stretched longer than it should have, as if even time itself wanted to test how much I wanted this day.

Morning didn't arrive gently. It came all at once, pulling me out of a sleep that didn't feel complete, and the first thing I felt wasn't energy, but urgency—because today wasn't just any day. It was the day I would finally be with you, not through a screen, not through messages, but in real moments, real time, real distance closed by real steps.

And somehow... I was already late.

It almost felt inevitable.

The bouquet and the gift weren't even with me. They were hidden away at someone else's house because I couldn't risk my mother seeing them, and the one person who was supposed to help me get them to the bus stop had fallen asleep at the worst possible moment. Time slipped, quietly at first, then all at once, and every minute that passed felt heavier than it should have.

My mother stayed downstairs longer than expected, just enough to delay me again, just enough to make everything harder, and by

the time I finally stepped out, the morning I had imagined so carefully had already begun falling apart.

Then came the bakery.

Closed.

For the first time ever.

I stood there for a second, laughing at how perfectly things were going wrong, the day itself was asking me whether I really wanted this enough to keep going. So, I turned back, found another place, bought something else, adjusted again, fixed again, because quitting was not an option.

And still... I kept getting late.

By the time I got onto the bus, I had already accepted it. Maybe this was just how it was meant to be. *Maybe every time I was supposed to meet you, something had to stand in the way first.* This cannot be a coincidence anymore.

The bus was quiet, almost empty, and for a moment I thought I could finally breathe. I placed my bag carefully, holding onto everything like it mattered more than anything else. But even that moment didn't last.

Someone came, didn't ask, didn't care, and threw my bag aside just enough to fold the bouquet I had spent so much time making.

I remember that feeling.

That instant irritation.

That anger.

But it disappeared just as quickly, because nothing in that moment mattered more than reaching you.

And somehow...

I did.

I reached your place, stood at a road that split into three, unsure of which direction to take, unsure how close I really was, until I called you and you told me to wait.

And then—

I saw you. From afar.

Running.

Not walking, not slowly approaching, but running towards me like the distance between us was something you wanted to end as quickly as possible. And in that moment, everything that had gone wrong—the delays, the stress, the folded bouquet—none of it stayed.

It was just you.

And for a second, I forgot how to move, how to think, how to react, because seeing you like that... it didn't feel normal. It felt like something I had imagined too many times, now happening in front of me.

You bought me my favourite drink, the White Monster.

Something so small, but made me so happy.
Because it meant you remembered.

We started walking after that, slowly at first, like neither of us wanted to rush into anything, like we both wanted to let the moment settle properly. You showed me your world—your streets, your turns, the small places that meant nothing to anyone else but somehow felt important because they were yours.

You pointed at shops you passed every day, places you had stories attached to, little details about your routine, and I listened to all of it like it mattered more than anything else—because it did.

When we reached your home, everything slowed down again. I met your family, spoke to them, tried to act normal even though nothing about that moment felt ordinary to me. I wasn't just visiting a place—I was stepping into your world.

And somewhere in between all of that, I gave you the gift.

I watched you open it, watched your expressions shift from curiosity to excitement, watched your smile grow in a way that made everything I had done feel worth it. That was all I wanted. That was always enough. The best part, I have it all recorded with me.

Then came the moment I had been carrying the entire day.

The bouquet.

Bouquet of red spider lilies, all handmade.

I remember every single thing, your favourites, your likes, things you enjoy and things you hate.

I fixed it as much as I could and made you listen a song in the earphones so you wouldn't notice. Even though I knew the folds would never completely disappear.

I asked you to come down from the bed, and when you stood there, I took it out and went down on one knee, exactly the way I had imagined so many times before. Finally, I was going to propose you.

But I froze.

My mind went blank.

My heart felt like it had been held too tightly, like something inside me had stopped everything at once, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't say a single word.

So, I just gave it to you.

And ...
you understood.

You handled it so naturally, so effortlessly, like you knew what I had been trying to do without needing me to say it. You turned what could have been an incomplete moment into something whole.

How did you do it so smoothly? You gave it to your mom saying I made it for her and then kept it in your own room.

And the day kept moving.

We went out after breakfast-Noodles and all the capsicum you dumped into my plate and two games of chess with her younger brother.

And for the first time you fed me something with your own hands.

Aunty really cooked well, the food and the daughter as well.

At some point, we stopped at a shop again, and I bought another drink, the Mucho Loco Monster, telling you it was something you could try, but you refused because of the caffeine and instead got your own Mazza. We stood there for a while, just talking, just being there, and it felt simple in a way that didn't need to be anything more.

Next, we went to a pharmacy?

Stared at skin products, supplements, a bit of laugh here and there and obviously that thing. *ahem*

Then we got your favourite Mogu Mogu, the litchi one.

I asked for a sip.

You gave it without hesitation.

And when I handed it back, you just stared at it for a second.

“Why are you looking at it like that?” I asked.

You paused, then said quietly, “I was checking you if gulped down all the jelly. Only because it's you. I wouldn't have shared it with anyone else.”

What could I say?

We kept walking, laughing, talking about random things, noticing small things around us, pointing out things that didn't matter, yet somehow felt important. People looked at us sometimes, maybe out of curiosity, maybe because *we looked like something we didn't even realise ourselves.*

And maybe we did.

Because it didn't feel like just two people walking.

It felt like something softer.

Something forming quietly.

We ate together, talked more, laughed at small things, and somewhere in between all of that, time kept slipping away without asking.

Then came the terrace.

The swing.

We sat there, side by side, and for the first time that day, everything became quiet in a way that didn't feel empty. There were no distractions, no noise, no interruptions—just the sound of the wind, the slight creak of the swing, and the presence of you beside me.

And that was enough for me to spend a whole life with you like that. Did you feel the same?

We didn't say anything extraordinary. We didn't need to. The conversation drifted slowly, from small things to slightly deeper ones, from random thoughts to quiet confessions, and somewhere in between, the silence started speaking more than the words.

There were moments where neither of us said anything, yet it didn't feel awkward. It felt full. Like the space between us had learned how to exist without needing to be filled.

I remember looking at you once, twice and then for minutes. Something that was the most beautiful to me then.

The way your hair moved slightly with the wind, the way your voice softened when you spoke slower, the way you looked away when something felt a little too real.

And I remember thinking—

how can something so simple feel like this?

A swing.

A quiet terrace.

And you.

That moment didn't feel like something happening in time.

It felt like something I wanted to stay in.

Forever.

We went downstairs again, then came back up later, almost like we weren't ready to let that space go. And the second time felt even softer, even quieter, like the moment had settled deeper into both of us.

But not everything in that day was easy.

I noticed it.

The way your grandmother looked at me, the doubt in her eyes, the quiet suspicion that followed us without being spoken out loud. It didn't ruin the day, but it stayed, like something I couldn't ignore, like being questioned without being asked anything directly.

And when it was finally time to leave...

I didn't want to.

Not even a little.

If I could have stayed, I would have.

Every second with you felt like something I didn't want to lose, something I wanted to stretch just a little longer, but life doesn't pause for what you want.

So, I left.

And even the way back felt strange, like everything I had used to reach you had taken something from me in return. The bus, the chaos, the sudden burn of something hot falling onto my head, the ceiling light's filament fell onto my head, two people got into a fight and one of them hit the light—it all happened, but none of it mattered as much as the fact that I was sad enough to be no longer there with you.

That night, when everything had settled, when the day had finally ended but somehow still hadn't left me, I called you.
I was sad.

We talked.

Like we always did.

I explained you that I wanted to propose but I couldn't.
To which you answered that I'll be able to do it someday.
You insisted to say something because it would be easy for you, wanted a script so I just answer – the full form.
I never expected an answer.

And somewhere in between everything—you said it.

So easily.

So casually.

The thing I wanted to hear, ever since I saw you, ever since our story began.

“I love you.”

For a moment, I couldn’t process it.

Not because I didn’t hear it.

But because I wasn’t ready for how easily you could say something I had struggled to even begin.

My mind went quiet.

Then loud.

Then quiet again.

And somehow...

I said it back.

“I love you too.”

Only in the back of my mind, I failed again.

And just like that, everything changed.

Might had been words for her to me they meant everything.

Because that day wasn’t just another day.

It was the day everything I had felt finally found its voice.

And maybe...

this was never random.

Because somehow, every time I have to meet you, I end up being late.

The first time I saw you, I was late and ended up in the only seat left—behind you.

The next time, again, I was late, and that is why we spoke.

Another day, I was late picking you guys up and that was yet another memorable day.

And even today...

I was late again.

So, tell me—

is it just coincidence,

or did the universe write it this way?

Because if being late is what brings me to you like this,

if it gives me days like this,

moments like this,

a love like you—

then I don't want to be on time.

I just want to keep arriving late, every single time,

if it means I get to have you...

and days like this...

for the rest of my life

The End

Epilogue

The 4th of April has arrived

A very happy birthday to you.

I hope this day feels as warm and as beautiful as you are, because you truly deserve that kind of light in your life.

I don't know how to say everything perfectly, but I know this much—I love you. Somewhere along the way, that feeling became something constant, something I carry without even thinking about it.

This is just a small attempt to hold onto what we've lived. A way to make sure we never forget any of it. Maybe it's small, but it's mine—something I made so you could feel special, even if just for a moment. I want you to know how much I respect you. For everything you go through, for how strong you are even when things get hard—I am truly proud of you.

And the things you don't like about yourself... I don't see them that way. I love your scars. I love the parts you try to hide. The things you hate, I somehow find myself caring for even more.

That day on the swing made me realise I want to spend every second of my life with you. Not in some grand way, just simply... sitting beside you, talking, existing together.

I wish someday you see me with the same eyes that I see you with.

I don't know what the future holds. But I do know this—

I want to be beside you, every second I can.

Thank you... for coming into my life, for changing me, and for making me who I am today.